Neither Savage Nor Wise

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/34040038.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Alana Bloom, Dr. Frederick Chilton
Additional Tags:	Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, Character Study, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Angst, Hurt/Comfort, Religious Imagery & Symbolism, Homoeroticism, Mild Blood, Pining, Tenderness, Hannibal is not having a good time, Childhood Trauma, (mentioned but not very in depth), Mental Instability, Mental Institutions, Sexual Tension, Cannibalism as Flirting, why are will and hannibal like this?, why can't these old men just touch each other like normal people?
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of unrelated hannigram oneshots
Stats:	Published: 2021-09-23 Completed: 2021-10-01 Words: 8,530 Chapters: 2/2

Neither Savage Nor Wise

by ifonlyiwaswittier

Summary

Stripped of the accoutrements that made up his life as a psychiatrist and socialite, Hannibal waits for Will to return and release him— even as his grip on sanity starts to slip and his faith in Will begins to waver, despite how desperately he longs to be together again.

Or, Hannibal's life during the 3 years he was imprisoned at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, and the night on the bluff afterwards.

Notes

Big shout outs to Ji and Jade for beta'ing this fic, cheering on the rampant homoeroticism, and providing moral support.

I took huge liberties with what incarceration is like for people who've been declared criminally insane but also Hannibal's prison cell is fancier than my current apartment so I think it's justified.

Title from this letter Hannibal writes to Will in the hospital during The Red Dragon novel (lbr, I ignore Harris canon until it suits my angst needs).

The next chapter is coming out next week and yes, Will plays a major in-person role in that one.

Dear Will

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"What will it take for you to behave?" Alana asks in lieu of a greeting.

Hannibal blinks. She's had him strung up, bound to a hand cart and deposited in a holding area so they could talk and it's not the question he'd expected. This has been happening more and more often lately. It's so pedestrian, to be surprised by other people, but now that the majority of the excitement is over — interviews conducted, confessions recorded, the long legal proceedings set in motion— the days have been wearing down his mind like a whetstone dragged the wrong way against a blade. He spends hours on end in his memory palace with Will, using all his energy trying to predict him, leaving him nothing left to divine the actions of others.

"You're going to be here for a long time, Hannibal," Alana continues, "even longer if Chilton manages to pull off this insanity plea, but I'm not holding my breath. We both know that I could make your life hell and you could make my life hell, or we could take the easy route. I don't have the energy to be constantly fighting. Do you?"

He does. But there are other things— other people— that he'd rather devote himself to than petty power struggles with a woman marked for death.

"The path of least resistance," he says.

She nods. "You're in no place to make demands. If your requests are reasonable then I'll consider them, but if you put even one toe out of line I'll make sure you're begging the judge for the death penalty."

He must admit, it's quite amusing to watch Alana play the villain. She wears the costume well, and he admires her dedication to the role, but he's been too deep inside her to believe this is what's really in her heart. He knows she's scared; it ruins the suspension of disbelief.

"I'll tell you what I told Jack Crawford," he says. "I've come quietly and I have no intention of being anything but a model prisoner. I am at your mercy, o jailer."

"Forgive me if I have a hard time believing that."

"It's a promise," he says. She fails to hide her wince.

The negotiations begin.

The days pass with little variation.

Every once in a while he gets a visitor: Alana, when there is some new matter to arbitrate, a request to negotiate. Mr. Metcalf, when there are papers to sign, more rights of his he must

relinquish. Frederick, near daily to poke and prod him for both his book and his insanity defense. He loves those visits in particular, and can barely contain his mirth at watching Frederick's mounting frustration at his own ineffectuality.

In general the visits are amusing, if not intellectually stimulating, and remind him that he had a life before this and that he will have a life again — his true self waiting in the wings for Will to usher him back on stage. But as the days drag on, the lawyers retreat to prepare their arsenals; Alana becomes confident in his containment; Frederick finishes the first draft of his manuscript. It falls silent outside his mind.

He is not a man who fears solitude. He has largely been alone since he was a small child — metaphorically, if not literally. There are many times when solitude is, in fact, preferable to company. Some intellectual pursuits are best undertaken alone. He decides to make good use of his time while he waits for Will to decide that he has been sufficiently punished and come to retrieve him. He teaches himself Sanskrit, something he's wanted to do for years but had unfortunately been unable to pursue given all his other responsibilities. Through the Baltimore Public Library, the hospital has a librarian that comes once a week and Hannibal is thoroughly impressed by the young woman's ability to procure texts for him.

"Your talents are being wasted here," he tells her one week. "Have you ever considered entering the book trade? The field needs more tenacious young minds like yours."

She thanks him amicably and jots down his requests for the week. He admires her genial unflappability; there are many truly frightening individuals at the hospital and yet she comes back each week, as cheerful and eager to help as ever. He makes a mental note to send her a hefty sum of money anonymously to show his gratitude once Will releases him, maybe he will even open a position at a rare book dealer's shop for her.

But despite the way he's nourishing his intellect, it still feels like his mind is turning against him with its hunger for challenge, for discussion. Like all cravings, it can be ignored. He is in control of his mind, he tells himself, not the other way around. And yet, he finds himself granting interview requests more and more often despite his initial refusal. He does not think himself a vain man; he disdains the tasteless, ostentatious displays that so many of the intelligentsia indulge in, parading their pursuits around for show. It is not a ploy for validation, he tells himself, but rather an opportunity to act on the natural desire to share new knowledge with others, an intellectual exercise that he is otherwise denied.

He feels like a dog at the end of its leash, a hooked fish tugging against the fisherman's drag as his life is reeled into the hospital. It shows him how Will has changed even the way he conceptualizes his own sensations and experiences and he delights in that evidence of their connection, so the feeling isn't all bad, but he does not want to reveal how desperate he is for conversation. The visits from Alana and Frederick change tenor. He hides his pushes towards rebuttal in antagonism and barbs but that only results in them visiting even less. So disappointing, so pathetically *average*; Will had always only ever been spurred on by his prodding. But he shouldn't have expected more from such small minds anyway.

"Excuse me," he says to a nurse as she places his meal in the box that connects him to the outside world. He is behind his worktable; the compliance is beginning to itch at him. It is the

first time he has spoken aloud in three days, but he and Will have had many conversations in his mind in that time.

“Yes?” she asks. He had chosen to wait for this nurse while she was, presumably, on her weekend because he thought he’d have the most luck with her. She is stern, but professional and, unlike some of the other nurses, doesn’t take advantage of her position to be cruel.

“Shawna,” the guard in the doorway begins.

“It’s fine,” she says, waving a hand at him over her shoulder. “What is it, Dr. Lecter?”

Another thing he appreciates about her: the few times she has addressed him, she has always used his title. His arrest might have negated his medical license, but it did not undo the work of his PhD.

“I heard one of your colleagues use a phrase the other day that I was unfamiliar with. I was unable to find any mention of it in my dictionary or encyclopedia, so I was hoping you might explain its meaning to me.”

She is puzzled but doesn’t refuse so he continues.

“The phrase is ‘mic drop,’” he says, carefully enunciating the words because the phrase feels unfamiliar in his mouth.

She frowns, perplexed. He is briefly concerned she doesn’t know the phrase either, but then she speaks.

“Um… it’s like, when a musician or someone does a big finale and then drops the microphone and walks off stage. Like, usually after dropping a bomb.”

He wants to tell her that using one colloquialism to explain another is often not helpful, but he doesn’t want a lesson in linguistics pedagogy to interfere with his other questions. It is an odd turn of phrase and, as with all new things, he wants to share it with Will. Perhaps he will ask him if he’s heard it the next time they speak. But first he must be sure he understands the meaning himself.

“And this is used metaphorically to represent when someone has ‘dropped a bomb’ so to speak, and then left suddenly?”

“Yeah, I guess,” she says. She has closed the hatch and is starting to drift towards the door. He takes a step around his table.

“And do you know the origin of this ‘mic dropping’ phenomenon?” he asks, taking another step forward. But she will not let him extend the conversation.

“Eat your dinner, Dr. Lecter,” she says before turning to the door.

“Thank you, Ms. Davis,” he says, despite the emotions dripping down his spinal cord and seeping into his throat like pus. They are feelings with claws, but he knows the sensation is psychological and refuses to clear his throat.

“Crazy old man,” the guard says as he steps out behind Ms. Davis.

“Sir,” Hannibal calls out after him. “If you have a moment, please.”

The guard rolls his eyes but waves Ms. Davis along, coming back in and closing the door behind him.

“Yeah?” he asks, arms folded across his chest. So slovenly, so smug. Retired military long past his prime, imbued with the kind of fragile manhood that always has something to prove. It would be pitiful if it wasn’t disgusting. He will make a nice confit for him and Will to share.

“May I have your name please?”

The man guffaws. “Is this one of your creepy serial killer intimidation tactics? You’re gonna have to try harder than that. I’ve been working here twenty years. I’m not scared of you, bud.”

Bud.

“You should be,” he snaps before he can stop himself.

“Should I?” the man laughs. He takes a step towards the glass barrier, and Hannibal, never afraid to rise to a challenge, does too. “Tonight I’m going home to my wife and children and you’re going to lie right over there,” he points towards the bed on the opposite side of the room, “and waste away in this little room until the end of time, unloved and unwanted. I’ve seen it happen with hundreds of guys like you — you start out so high and mighty, but give it a few years and you’ll be babbling and begging for your mommy while some poor nurse has the miserable job of tying you up so she can wipe the shit off your ass.”

“I will kill them first, if your family means so much to you,” he retorts, voice hollow. “I will tie *you* up and make you watch as I cut them open like swine and unwind their guts like crepe paper while they still writhe. Whose liver do you think would make the best foie gras? You wife? Or perhaps your little girl. Do you think you’ll foul yourself when I pull out their hearts?”

The man looks stunned for just a second and then he laughs.

“God, you’re uncreative,” he says, still chuckling. “That Gideon guy threatened to transplant our organs into each others’ bodies. Now *that’s* a good one, some real Frankenstein’s monster shit.”

Hannibal says nothing.

“You’re surrounded by crazies here, Hannibal the Cannibal,” the guard sing-songs as he walks away. He raises a hand and the doors part before him like the Red Sea. “You need to step up your game.”

Alana is there within the hour to take his drawing materials away.

Once he is back in Alana's good graces, she grants him cooking privileges, if you can call what he's allowed to do cooking. She says that maybe he can be allowed a couple plastic utensils if this goes well, but she needs time to coordinate enough guards anyway and he needs to prove he can control himself. He certainly will. The only thing that would mean more to him than being allowed to cook again would be cooking for Will.

So for now he is allowed to stand, bound on his hand cart, swaddled in a straightjacket and mouth guard, while he directs one of the hospital's chefs in cooking a meal. Alana brings for him a couple of the cookbooks he'd wanted, though by no means all the ones he'd requested, and he selects a recipe with relatively simple ingredients. He gives Alana a grocery list, with detailed notes on brands, sources, aging, ripeness, and potential substitutes. They bring back some of the correct things, but most are not of high quality and some are missing entirely. A temporary setback, he reminds himself. He will be in control of his own food again as soon as Will allows him to be.

"I suppose the prison's budget isn't what it used to be," he jokes when they show him the store brand olive oil he procured. No one laughs.

The chef is able enough but does not seem to be very enthused with being included in the exercise. A shame, really: Hannibal is quite knowledgeable about cuisine and the man could certainly benefit a lot, if he let himself.

"Now slice the onions into rounds, if you please," Hannibal directs. He is careful to use the same tone he used with his medical residents when he was still instructing at Hopkins, direct but encouraging.

"Dicing would work better in this kind of dish," the chef says, bringing the knife down to half the onion. He tries not to wince. Dicing? Really? Do textures and plating mean nothing to this man?

"I'd prefer if you sliced it, please," he says but the man dices anyway.

Once— just once— they allow him to taste test. A taser is pressed to his side, but it's not the force of the jab that takes him breath away: it's excitement. From behind, two hands are placed firmly on either side of his head, holding him in place, and he mouth guard drops. A long tasting spoon is brought to his lips. He closes his eyes in anticipation and —

It's all wrong. He wants to gag on it. The recipe and the measurements were right there, he was giving the chef instructions at every step of the way. *How* could he have messed up the ratios so badly? And it's not just that. It's the textures and, as he opens his eyes, the colors too and —

They slip the mouth guard back over his face. The taser is removed. The hands are removed. His disappointment stays firmly in place. It was not that he thought it would be nearly as good as his own cooking; it would have been an unrealistic expectation of a chef working at a state hospital because, if he was that skilled, he would not be working at a state hospital. But he had hoped it would be good enough to do the trick, to transport him back to the first time he and Will had dinner at his house. The simple ingredients then had been a concession to Will's tastes, now a concession to the restraints of his confinement and still— *still* — the

flavors were so off base that even taste and scent, the strongest of all memory types, couldn't bring him back to the moment he so desperately wanted to return to.

He schools his face into something approaching neutrality.

"If you could add a pinch more salt, please," he says. "I'd be much obliged."

It's getting hard to focus on reading. No matter, he thinks, he will spend his days drawing instead. Interests naturally wax and wane with time. Surely his interest in reading will return to him soon.

It's getting hard to draw anything except Will. No matter, he thinks. Artists throughout time have repeated themes and subjects in their works. No one criticizes Monet for painting his garden dozens of times; Will is even more exquisitely beautiful than Giverny and he is Hannibal's muse in every sense of the word. It's good practice. Repetition is a useful drawing exercise. Each time he gets a bit nearer to perfecting the weight of the lines of his body, the shading of his beard, the sheen of his eyes.

When he works through a stack of paper, they take the drawings away before giving him more sheets. It is a loss, but a small one. He has been frustratingly unable to capture Will's perfection in the drawings anyway.

It is getting hard to keep track of the days without the help of his calendar. They are all so similar.

He has been spending his time with Mischa more often than not. Sometimes she wakes him with her infant cries in the middle of the night. Sometimes she is a toddler tugging at the legs of his jumpsuit. Sometimes she is sitting with him while he crosshatches the drapes of his office in Baltimore, using the contrast to offset the way they frame Will's face— a young woman, the one she never got to be, with mannerisms suspiciously like Abigail's.

He hasn't spent time with her in decades. Not since he left for boarding school in Paris at age sixteen, determined to begin a new chapter in his life. He had filled her room in his mind palace with soft toys, puzzles, books she would enjoy, warm blankets, her favorite foods. He didn't want her to suffer, which was why he closed the door and locked it from the outside: she wouldn't want to see his becoming because it would hurt her; it would hurt her because she couldn't understand, because she'd been taken when she was too young to understand. It was painful to say goodbye but also better for both the of them. She must have climbed out a window. He hadn't been able to bring himself to board them up; he couldn't deny her the view. He had never been able to deny her anything and that was why he had eaten her.

"Perhaps, I will introduce Will to you someday," he says to her one afternoon when she peers over his shoulder at his drawing. She is hardly tall enough to see over him even while he sits, a small child today. He speaks with her in English even though it is a language she never knew. He cannot bring himself to speak Lithuanian, even in his mind. It is his mother tongue; it is the language of his nightmares.

“When is he coming to get you?” she asks.

As a child, he had learned not to count the days. It only made enduring worse. Now he can’t help but count the ever-growing number of days since Will left him in here. Surely this punishment will end eventually.

Won’t it?

“Soon,” he says, pulling Mischa close and putting his nose in her hair. He can no longer remember what she smelled like but his mind, disturbingly, fills in an overpowering aftershave, spicy, with artificial musk.

“Soon,” he repeats.

It’s difficult to tell what season it is through the skylight. He is not allowed outside. For his exercise he is taken to the poorly equipped rec room instead. He has gotten soft but this does not distress him in the ways he thought it would: he is confident that Will can protect him in his weakened state, but he wishes he still had the full faculties of his body to protect Will if the need arose. He works harder to maintain his muscle mass, but his diet lacks protein and the rest of his life is so uncharacteristically sedentary that the progress is minimal.

With the lack of other windows in the building, he can only tell when it’s winter. The snow on the skylight is what gives it away. There are some other clues for the other seasons: more sunshine in the summer, red and yellow leaves accumulating on the skylight in the fall, grey rainy skies and a thin coating of yellow pollen in the spring. But those all blur together and none are as definite as winter.

Winter when he arrived, winter when he marked his one year anniversary. Winter again. Winter again. Winter again. It becomes the drumbeat that sets the tempo of the years sliding into each other, creating enough mass until they avalanche onto him, dragging him through the pines and boulders of his mind’s mountainsides until he is deposited in the bottom of a deep, deep ravine.

He doesn’t wait for Will to come release him anymore. He just waits. And waits. And waits.

He thinks of writing Will, asking him: *is this sufficient? Have I been brought down low enough for you yet? I do not fear the depths themselves, but I do fear discovering that there is no floor, just endless falling. I will endure it for you. I would endure anything for you. Do you remember the nights we spent in my study sipping glasses of whiskey, and talking until the sky began to lighten? Do you remember what my sweater felt like against your chest, when I insisted you sleep in my guest room for a few hours before heading back to Quantico? I have never been jealous of an article of clothing before or since; I had never thought I was even capable of experiencing that feeling towards anyone, let alone an inanimate object. I should have insisted you sleep in my room instead; I should have put off breakfast preparations to lie there beside you and witness your slumber, one of my favorite things to watch. Though my mistakes are not regrets, I would take away your pain if I could.*

Do you remember what it was like to love me? Because I believe you did, at one point. I hope you did. I do not blame you if you cannot find mercy for me in your heart. I just ask you to look.

But while he will endure anything for Will, he will not debase himself like that. It would not do any good, besides: it would violate the rules of the game they are playing and Hannibal is nothing if not a fair and patient opponent.

"Alana says you've been talking to yourself lately," Frederick says the next time he comes to visit. "Is that true or is she just trying to goad me into making a fool of myself?"

It is true.

"No one needs to goad you into doing that," he says, but a moment later he realizes he hasn't spoken at all.

There is nothing wrong with him, he knows. Long periods of solitary confinement have been used to drive one's enemies insane for centuries. His mind is responding to his circumstances as his mind should. That's not the concerning part. What's concerning is how his imprisonment is melting the locks off the doors in his mind palace like Dali's clocks and now the creatures that inhabit those rooms flit down the hallways and corner him at dead ends. Some of them are painful to encounter for entirely banal reasons: the human mind has evolved to let us forget the pain of losing someone because, otherwise, how could the mind ever tolerate forming another relationship, knowing full well what lies ahead? For that reason, no one would want to watch their family being killed over and over, the memory of hunger pangs zipping through his middle and up to the backs of his eyelids like a broken film loop all night long. But Hannibal is an optimist, at the end of the day — hope for the best, plan for the worst — and so he tries to find the benefits of the experience, even if they are obscured at times. Those memories are losing their potency, the viscera sewn into his very bones until it is so thoroughly engrained it no longer causes him pain. He had never thought himself traumatized by the event— he had reclaimed his power over the narrative which, he had seen again and again at his practice, trauma victims could not do. But he is mature enough to admit he has realized that he had always been avoidant of the memories, a common trait among the traumatized. But now there is nothing to avoid anymore. He has prodded the bruise until the sensation has become as natural as touching any part of his skin.

Though other rooms in his mind were locked off for reasons that he cannot bring himself to consider, reasons nearly as painful as the contents themselves. Will's smile in the doorway of his kitchen. The way he would shift in his chair when Hannibal had made a particularly clever point, like an animal preparing itself to pounce. The life he'd imagined for him and Abigail and Will in Italy. His hands holding Will's. His fantasies on Will's hands on his body.

He realizes he's been silent too long after Frederick asked him a question.

"Are you mining for more details to add to my insanity defense, Frederick?" he asks. Sometimes, on the rare occasions he speaks aloud, it's hard to find the words in the right language, like sifting through a dictionary with the pages out of order. "Because certainly this

cannot concern your book. You've already shipped off that dross to darken some poor publisher's doorstep."

It is incredibly satisfying when Frederick storms out.

He steps out from behind his work table too early. Unintentional in his excitement to get his newly sharpened pencils back after waiting over a day for them, but Alana takes away his rec room privileges all the same. He prowls the perimeter of his cage. Does push ups in the far corner of the room, then adds some variety to his routine but doing situps in the other corner. He earns his rec room privileges back but then he throws a book at the plexiglass divider sometime soon after. He hadn't thrown it at anybody. There had been no one else in the room at the time. In his mind, he had been listening to a symphony he'd seen at Carnegie Hall soon after he moved to the United States but once it was over, it started again from the beginning. And again. He just couldn't get it to be quiet. Alana takes his hair gel. He lets his hair fall in his face so she can't make eye contact when she tries to talk to him. He earns his hair gel back but then he does something they dislike again — he's not even entirely sure what, this time, for they're never very clear or consistent about his missteps or the resulting punishments — and they withhold his daily newspapers.

"What is so important that you need to speak with me in person?" Alana asks him several days after he loses his newspaper privileges, their return nowhere in sight. Lately, she has taken to sending a liaison or a letter when she must communicate something to him, and will only accept letters back. It is the first time they have spoken face to face in months.

"I simply wish to assess the degree to which you wasted the resources of your education. Because if you had been paying attention in my classes, you would know that punishing a patient without defining the psychiatric unit's rules in advance or explaining the infraction is, in fact, a human rights violation."

"Human rights are for humans," she says and he smiles, amused yet again at her attempts to embody the vengeance she thinks his narrative demands.

"What is it, then, that you consider me?" he asks. Though he sees her rationale— he has often felt he was set apart from the rest of humanity, more evolved— he has never felt more keenly human than he has in the past several weeks, waiting with increasing desperation for Will to return to him as autumn, once again, began its inexorable slide into winter. Will, who has taught him the true depths of his vulnerability more poignantly than starvation or frostbite could. Will, who has made him human by giving him a god to kneel at the altar of. Some nights he whispers Will's name over and over, a prayer and a benediction all at once. He whispers it so quietly that even the microphones that record his every sound can't hear him, so quietly that sometimes he isn't sure if he's spoken at all or if his heartbeat has become the sound of Will's name, pumping life through him even when he craves a few moments of nothingness to provide some relief from his longing. He doesn't often sleep anymore, but when he does he dreams of the syllables of Will's name (*Will Graham, Will Graham*) unraveling themselves until they swallow him whole. What is more human than that, than insatiable want?

Alana shakes her head. "You're something else entirely."

“I see,” he says, “I suppose I shall take up the matter with the Human Rights Board then.”

“You are certainly entitled to do that,” she replies as she turns towards the door, “just like everybody else.”

It rankles him, to be treated like a common prisoner, to have his concerns dismissed instead of treated with the respect and consideration they deserve. The only thing that restrains him from saying something truly vicious— from flaying her open before her nurses and guards so they can see how soft and pink her fleshy insides truly are— is that he knows it was her intention to offend him. And, more importantly: he wants his newspapers back.

“I’m sure the board will be very sympathetic, Hannibal,” she adds, her sarcasm barely concealing how deeply he terrifies her.

“Alana,” he calls after her, but she still raises her hand to signal for the doors to open. “Dr. Bloom,” he says instead and then she turns to look at him, surprised. “When may I have my newspapers again?”

Alana smirks, enamored with her own power over him. He wonders how he should prepare her meat when the time comes. What dishes shall he serve Will when he finally sits at Hannibal’s table again? Perhaps he shall feed her Margot and the ill-gotten child he gave them first, fatten her up for slaughter.

“When you’ve earned them back,” Alana intones with mock pity.

He takes a deep breath, steadying his voice against rage and anguish that flutters between his vocal cords.

“Please.”

She softens, just barely, and he remembers the nights they’d spent together in front of his harpsichord before they’d fall into bed together— the inevitable conclusion to a give and take of seduction for her, a carefully orchestrated exercise for him. He remembers the way she loved to take care of him, the way she loved when he’d pretend to let her, pretend to plead for her.

“I’ll think about it.” And then she disappears between the doors.

Toying with Alana’s emotions is nearly entertaining enough to make up for his lack of reading materials, but even these games grow tiresome eventually. He is suffering from depression, he knows. His psychiatric practice may not have always been entirely conventional, but he did earn his license and degrees on his own merit and knows the symptoms. Knows the way the brain shuts parts down of itself as a natural response to under-stimulation and confinement. The difference between him and the average neurotic is that he has never been one to foster under-stimulation and confinement in his life, while many of the people he treated built their own cages.

He eventually earns his newspaper back, including the requested print-offs of Tattlecrime articles. They always cut out the pictures (*Don’t want you to get any ideas*, Alana had said)

even the ones that aren't of maps or crime scenes. But it is of no consequence: the articles about Will are the only ones he'd care to see the pictures from anyway and his mind has vast galleries of images he can fill in instead.

Tattlecrime has gotten dull lately, though, increasingly dull since Hannibal has begun his extended stay and Will left to wherever he went to hide from his true nature. Garden variety sadists. Run of the mill violent outbursts. An occasional article about a new piece of contrived evidence Freddie has supposedly uncovered for cold cases that have True Crime documentaries. Where is the artistry, he thinks. Where is the beauty, the love of the craft? There had always been those whose minds were too small to understand such things, the power of transformation, of transubstantiation, but it was like the whole world had forgotten the inherent divinity of controlling death.

But then he saw the Tooth Fairy. Freddie always was quite awful about picking these horrendous little nicknames. They had cut out the pictures that Freddie had likely broken into the crime scene to take, but she was dogged with details — even if those details were fabricated, *especially* if those details were fabricated — and he could picture himself reflected in the mirrors on the dead woman's eyes. He wanted to see Will reflected there too. The red threads not a beacon tracing the path of the arterial spray to the heavens, but a lifeline connecting the two of them again. It is not the artistry he wants. He'd hardly call it artistry at all. But it's enough. Enough to confound Jack Crawford and drive him back to leech from Will again. Jack had not earned that, did not deserve to suckle on the ambrosia of Will's thoughts. But he also knew Will would follow that siren song until he was dashed to pieces against the rocks. He could not resist the chance to give into his instincts under the guise of ostensibly helping people, but had also surely done everything to shake the killer's mindset in the meantime. He would need to get it back and get it back more quickly than he could on his own because this man — this creature — was killing on a cycle. It could drive Will back to him. Hannibal would ensure it.

He pulls a piece of paper towards him and composes a letter. Rips that to shreds so fine that Alana won't be able to read it once they come to take his paper. He begins again.

I think of you constantly and have recently started praying again to a god I have never believed in, just to ask if you've ever thought of me too, he wants to write.

I have not heard the sound of music in three years, he wants to write*, but I would gladly live in silence the rest of my life if it meant I could hear your voice just one more time.*

Please, he wants to write, *I've been waiting for you and I would wait for you forever because I know if I were to break out you'd shun me forever. Living like this is preferable to that slow death only because I have my hope to nourish me when I grow weak. I'm sorry I drove you away. I will let this be your choice if that is what you want, but please —*

He wants to write: *I dream of you often. In my dreams you have your arms around me. To hold me or to kill me, I do not care which.*

I miss you, he wants to write.

Dear Will, he writes instead.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on tumblr at ellswritesthings.tumblr.com. See y'all next week for the last chapter, and please comment in the meantime if you want to!

An Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Hannibal, Will, and that afternoon they spent at the house on the bluff.

Chapter Notes

And this is it!

Thank you to everyone for reading and for the comments y'all left on the first chapter! Another big shout out to Ji and Jade for their wonderful beta reading. And a huge thank you to my friends Kyra and Yanjie for adding fuel to this obsession and your sweet and encouraging compliments after the first chapter! I guess this weirdly sensual not-quite-erotic Hannigram is dedicated to you guys? You're welcome, I guess?

For the first time in three years he feels the sun. It is nothing like he remembered, yet also exactly the same.

He turns on the radio once Will settles into the passenger seat and finds the local NPR station. They are playing a concert of Beethoven sonatas. Once, when he was bound on the hand cart, being wheeled between the rec room and his cell, he had overheard music coming from one of the nurse's stations. It was mid-century American Rock and Roll, which he has no taste for. Regardless, he thought about throwing his weight to the side to bring himself crashing to the ground. The punishment would have been excruciating, surely, but it might have been worth it to lie on his side and listen to music outside his head for just a few moments. Now, he gets to hear beautiful music and Will's voice. It's pure bliss. He does not care one bit for the terrible things they both know lie ahead of them. He is overjoyed. Will has come back for him. This is the happiest he has been in his entire life.

He thinks the idiom really should be "it's like driving a car" instead of riding a bike because the skill comes back to him easily, even though he hasn't driven since he lived in Baltimore. He had been indifferent to the task before, simply a necessary practicality of living in the United States, but now he is giddy. He could take them anywhere; they don't have to follow the path that has been predetermined for them. But the plentiful options are overwhelming after years of no choices and he finds himself driving to his house on the cliff by muscle memory. Will does not ask where they're going. Perhaps he also cares little for the destination as long as they go there together.

They walk the grounds around the perimeter just to be safe, but they are alone for now. Hannibal has never cared much for nature beyond its aesthetic beauty but he bends down to touch the grass of the well manicured lawn on the southern side of the house. The gardener must still be paid through one of his offshore accounts, evidently. He has the sudden and childlike urge to put his toes in the grass and even though the desire passes quickly he follows through anyway, just because he can. He gingerly lowers himself to the ground, his body moving different than it had the last time he had been free. He is heavier than he remembers, worn. But when he slips off his velcro shoes and cheap polyester socks, the way his toes wiggle in the grass feels the same. He tips his head back to the sun and sighs contentedly. When he opens his eyes again, Will is watching him with a curious expression.

Will.

Will .

There are no words for his sun-haloed splendor, radiant enough to brighten the daytime sky all by himself. Hannibal smiles. It's been so long since he has genuinely smiled it pulls at his cheeks, bunching the new wrinkles that have formed around his eyes the past few years. He wants to be solemn. He knows this is a solemn occasion, especially for Will, but he can't bring himself to be dour. Not yet. He wants a bit more time suspended before they are dropped. He isn't ready to find out if they are a teacup or something sturdier just yet.

"Care to join me?" he asks. He thinks that once it starts to get dark, he will go inside and shower. Privately, with no one watching him, and then get dressed in real clothes. Maybe then this over-eager creature that's living in his skin will leave him and he will feel like himself again.

Will doesn't respond, but he toes off his shoes. He lowers himself to the ground with a groan.

"It's like we're old men now," Hannibal chuckles. Will laughs too.

"That's because we are," Will says, pulling his knees to his chest. That makes Hannibal laugh even harder. He's not sure what's so funny, but the more he thinks about it, the funnier it gets until he is doubled over his own legs with the force of his mirth.

"What did they do to you in there?" Will asks with bemusement. Hannibal wipes the tears from his eyes.

"Do you really have to ask?"

"No," Will replies curtly. "But three years is… a much longer time." He is clearly thinking of how much life he had lived in those three years, how much could happen.

And who's fault is that , he nearly snaps.

But he doesn't. It would serve no purpose except to lash out and he is done hurting Will because, clearly, that serves no purpose anymore either. And it's a rhetorical question besides: the fault is his own. Not in the obvious way of surrendering himself, but stretching further, backward in time to that first meeting in Jack's office, when they both had no clue what they

would become to each other. He had been so sorely unprepared for someone as all-consuming as Will. He understands that now.

“It is a long time,” he agrees eventually, “but I would have waited a hundred times more, millennia, if it meant I could have just one more moment by your side like this.”

Will leans forward and Hannibal thinks he will take off his socks to feel the grass too, but instead he rests his hand on Hannibal’s bare ankle. His hand is more calloused than the last time they touched, but just as warm. A shiver runs through his body and Will responds by digging his fingernails into Hannibal’s skin. He inhales sharply, both surprised and not surprised at the clear sharp pain, the burning mounting until the pressure suddenly bursts as Will breaks his skin. He doesn’t realize he has been holding his breath until he exhales at the sensation of Will entering him. They are small cuts, but Will wiggles his fingers to dig them further into the delicate skin, until blood wells up in the crescent moons of Will’s fingernails. Hannibal watches in rapture as the blood beads under Will’s fingers, catching on his fingertips and on Hannibal’s leg hairs. When Will is satisfied, he stops pressing and Hannibal looks up, Will’s nails still jammed in the wounds, to see Will watching him with equal awe.

“I’d let you do more,” Hannibal says breathlessly. Will’s lips part, but he says nothing. “I’d let you tear me limb from limb.”

“I already have,” Will says, voice rough. He sucks his bottom lip between his teeth and exhales sharply, moving his fingers so slightly to feel the give of Hannibal’s flesh.

“Again then,” Hannibal rasps. “With knives this time, instead of words.”

Will shakes his head. The blood is welling up around his fingertips, rolling in fat drops down to Hannibal’s ankle and into the grass.

“Then with your hands. You could rip my heart from my chest. Nothing would please me more.”

Their eyes meet, and Hannibal feels like it is the first time anyone has ever looked at him, so raw is the sensation of being seen by Will after so many years of being invisible.

“Tell me,” he asks, “would you taste my heart if it lay beating in your hands?”

“I’d devour it whole.”

His nerves sing as Will pulls his fingers from the wounds, rubbing his hand up Hannibal’s shin, his bloodied fingers leaving a trail along the side of his calf, then under the leg of his jumpsuit, pushing back the fabric as he moves along. Hannibal straightens his leg to grant Will’s searching fingers more access, but the material is too tight around his thigh and Will’s hand comes to rest on his knee. He sighs in contentment. The deep pleasure is so pure and so bright he has to close his eyes against its intensity. Hannibal wants to keep watching Will's face change as his body responds to the touch but he can’t bear it. He tips his head back and watches the pink insides of his eyelids where the skin is pierced by the light of the sun.

Hannibal loses track of time as they sit there, Will's hand on his knee, but he's been losing track of time for years now. It barely bothers him anymore.

When he opens his eyes, Will is watching him. His face is fierce, sharp with anger. He has every right to be angry, Hannibal knows, and when he feels himself chafe against that rage he draws up the acceptance he'd tried to cultivate in the hospital when he'd believed Will would never come for him.

"Are you going to kill the Dragon?" Will asks and Hannibal is humbled yet again. Being around Will is often an exercise in humility, a reminder that not everything in the world can be controlled, not every future divined. He had misread that expression, the hand on his knee. Will wasn't angry. He was jealous, possessive, protective.

"If you want me to," Hannibal says. "Do you want me to?"

Will picks at the grass with his free hand, then slides his hand off Hannibal's knee. He wishes to place Will's hand back on his body— no, he wishes to slide Will's fingers into his mouth, to suck the blood off his fingertips until he can taste nothing but copper and the sharp, sweet taste of Will's skin, until his tongue has lapped away all traces of everything Will's hands have ever touched that aren't him. It is a barren feeling, Hannibal thinks; he feels bereft with the loss of Will's touch.

"We should go inside," Will says. "Dolarhyde could be here any minute."

Hannibal just hums in response and lies down fully, stretching his arms out to either side. His hand rests close to Will's hip, but it would only draw more attention to move it now so he stays still. He wonders what Will would think if he stepped out of his jumpsuit and laid down nude on the lawn. It is a ridiculous urge, he knows, but he wants to feel the sun touch him in places he hasn't been touched in years.

Despite his words, Will doesn't move either. Again the clouds slip by until suddenly Will snatches up his hand. He startles, convinced something is wrong, but when he turns his head to look at Will, Will looks just as startled as him, as if he has shocked himself. They both still, watching the other to see who will make the next move.

"I've always encouraged you to follow your instincts," Hannibal says gently. "What are your instincts telling you to do right now, Will?"

Will lifts his hand, almost to his lips, but holds it just barely away. He can feel Will's labored breaths against his knuckles, the heat of his blush. The flaky maroon of dried blood, his own blood, peeks out from between their entwined hands where it still tinged Will's fingertips.

"I'm yours, Will," he tries to reassure. "Entirely. Always."

"How am I supposed to trust that?" he asks. "You haven't exactly made good on your promises before." The words move Will's lips so they brush against Hannibal's knuckles.

"Haven't I?"

But Will doesn't respond.

"You've turned me into your supplicant, Will," he says eventually. "I fall to my knees before you."

Will swallows hard, and Hannibal's gaze traces the bob of his Adam's apple. "Whatever it is you want," he responds, voice tight and shaking, "you can't have it."

"Always so quick to deny me. To deny yourself. Who was it that turned pleasure into such a bitter taste for you?"

"My pleasure tastes fine to me," Will says. He shakes his head. "Your pleasure, though? It tastes the way an electrical fire smells. Acrid and cloying. Can you blame me for wanting to stay away?"

"Yet here you are."

Silence falls over them again. There is a seagull hopping along the edge of the cliff; its compatriots soar above the water or perch on the rocks. Out of the corner of his eye, the flowers, arranged so tidily in their raised beds along the side of the house, bob in the wind. His hand is warm where Will is still holding it near his face, the strength of his bloodied fingers and the even puffs of his breath grounding him, keeping Hannibal from drifting off into his mind as he is wont to do these days.

"Some fires can't be put out," Will whispers, so quietly Hannibal can hardly hear him over the waves crashing into the cliff. He tips his head very slightly, bringing his lips to the back of Hannibal's hand and placing a dry, chaste kiss there. He turns Hannibal's hand and kisses his palm, lips lingering on his Lifeline. Hannibal lies perfectly still but watches rapt with awe, afraid to shatter this moment with his wretched, resplendent creature. He thinks of the superstitious old women he'd see in the village when the older boys were allowed to leave the orphanage. He thinks of one of the women tracing his Lifeline and tutting.

"There is much hardship ahead of you, boy" she'd said as he'd jerked his hand away.

He thinks that he'd suffer endless lifetimes of hardship just for this moment to never end. He thinks that, certainly, he's finally snapped under the pressure of days in the hospital and he's going to wake bound in a straightjacket at any moment. He thinks of nothing at all when Will runs his hand up Hannibal's arm, his shoulder, shivers when his hand reaches the bare skin of his neck, goosebumps covering his whole body. Will brings his hands up to Hannibal's cheek and he wants to cry; he hasn't since that afternoon sitting in the snow behind Will's house, waiting for Jack Crawford to come and take him away.

It is the first time in years that he has been touched with anything approaching gentleness. It is the first time in years that anyone has touched his bare skin at all. The last time was when they processed and booked him — no, before that, when Will had reached out for him, delirious and desperate, from that operating table at Muskrat Farm. Because no one else had ever touched him besides Will. Not really. If he could unspool his whole life and snip away the hands of everyone except Will's, he would. He has been ruined.

When it becomes obvious this is all Will is going to give him, he turns his head and kisses Will's palm, the same spot Will had kissed his own. A blessing, he thinks. To long life. He is not sure if he is allowed this, just as ready for Will to pull his hand back and slap him, but he has to try. They are about to fight the Dragon and depending on the outcome, he may never have the chance again. But instead, Will sighs and melts into the touch, presses his hand more firmly into Hannibal's face so his fingers spread across it. He can feel the tackiness of his dried blood on Will's fingertips where they are pressed into his forehead.

You don't have to test it , Hannibal wants to say. *I really am yours.*

"I think I'll cook us some dinner," Hannibal says instead, still speaking into Will's palm, but then Will withdraws his hand. The second it is retracted, he wants Will to cover him again. "It's been a long day. You must be hungry."

Will stands and Hannibal follows, dusting himself off and then, when Will turns in a silent request, brushing the grass off him too.

"Famished," Will says. And they go inside.

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